

I'm writing in opposition to bill SB 184. This bill adds COVID as an additional basis for using absentee ballot voting. This action would add unwarranted risk to our voting integrity.

As of this week, the number of people hospitalized for COVID is below 200 statewide. The number of cases is falling rapidly, and the seriousness of cases is declining just as dramatically. The FDA has indicated that it is likely that we will be in an endemic situation from this point forward. The history of viruses shows that endemic infections are much more mild than pandemic, as the survivability of a virus strain depends on its ability to find hosts. Victims who die or who are isolated prevent the spread, and thus the viability, of the virus; thus only viruses that are moderate or weaker in effect become endemic.

Absentee ballots can be requested far in advance of an election. Adding the seventh circumstance of "the sickness of COVID" begs the question: why is this affliction different than the third, which the bill reduces to a simple statement "illness"? (In fact, the removal of words indicating that the illness must be "such elector's or person's" – can it be somebody else's illness? My neighbor's?) But now, the COVID, which is increasingly a short duration mild affliction can be cause for requesting, long in advance of the election, an absentee ballot.

This bill opens Pandora's box. Adding reasons for voting by absentee ballot adds both voter identification/validation risk and registrar workload with its associated risk of human error. The chain of custody is fraught with unknowns. The ability to determine that the ballot is requested by and completed by the voter is sacrificed. The opportunity for outright fraud is increased. Dependence on the postal system adds another failure point, and ballots are lost. The delays in counting absentee ballots, aside from the long hours and extra work imposed on registrars and clerks, creates extended periods of uncertainty in providing election results to voters. In what should have been an easy odd-year election, the results of the 2021 town elections were not available for many hours after the polls closed.

Why not leave the reason of "such elector's or person's illness" as sufficient reason for the absentee ballot? If illness has been an acceptable reason in the past, it should suffice for the future without a knee-jerk reaction making COVID a stand-alone reason.

Dennis Crowe  
Madison CT